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ABSTRACT

This paper gives the reader some insight into the development and uses of one approach to school self-evaluation in Scottish schools. It first gives some history and background of the Scottish education system and its educational "glasnost." Following this is an explanation of the development of an approach to self-evaluation as a basis for school improvement and of the process that a project development team follows. The paper examines, discusses, and critically evaluates the materials and their uses. Examples of survey questions and responses to gain the perspectives of parents, pupils, teachers, and administrators are used to illustrate the evaluation process and methodology. The paper critically evaluates the process of undertaking the self-evaluation to ensure that respondents are fully informed of why the survey is being conducted, what is to be done with the information, and the confidentiality of the responses. The paper concludes by briefly summarizing issues in conducting self-evaluations. (RR)

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INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT 1992

"A role for parents, students, and teachers in school self-evaluation and development planning"

Purpose of the session

The purpose of this session will be to provide participants with the opportunity to

a) gain some insight into the the development and uses of one approach to school self-evaluation in Scottish schools

b) consider this approach to self-evaluation as a basis for school improvement

b) examine, discuss, and critically evaluate the materials and their uses

c) discuss the relevance of these to similar developments in Canada and elsewhere

d) consider what might be gained by international collaboration in this area

John MacBeath

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INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT 1992

"A role for parents, students, and teachers in school self-evaluation and development planning"

John MacBeath

The Scottish context - some history and Background

Scotland, although part of the United Kingdom, has a distinctively different system from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. National policy is set by the Scottish Office Department of Education (SOED) in the Capital City , and there is a national curriculum council, a national examination board, and a national educational research council who work closely with the SOED. A national body of 'Her Majesty's' inspectors (HMI) play a monitoring and support role with primary and secondary schools. A small team of HMI will spend a week in a school doing an in-depth study and feed back to the management of the school, as well as writing a published report which appears in the press and is publicly available.

The SOED must work closely with the 9 Regional authority departments of education who make their own policies within the framework of SOED guidelines. They look after the day-to-day administration of schools, are responsible for school building and closure, hiring and firing of staff, and are powerful bodies with their own advisory and quality assurance teams, and in some cases their own inspectorate. There is, perhaps inevitably, a tension between the national authority and the regional authorities, exacerbated by political control which resides at both the regional and national levels. In the United Kingdom as a whole (and in that highly important bit of it called Scotland) there are strongly opposing views of educational policy and priority taken by Conservative and Labour parties. In Scotland, there is currently at national level a Conservative Minister, elected at a General U.K Election, who makes policy and priority decisions on the advice of his civil servants; at regional level decisions are taken by education committees, chaired by a councillor who has been elected at **regional** elections. This councillor is, in almost all authorities, a member of the Labour party.

Educational Glasnost

Perhaps one of the most significant shifts at national level in the last few decades has been the move to greater accountability and greater openness, exemplified by the introduction of

- School Boards, with a constitutional parent majority
- Staff development and appraisal for all teachers and administrators
- A Parents Charter (part of a wider Citizens Charter), including a requirement on schools to publish reports on their performance

As part of this there has been a move, on the one hand, to a strengthening of the national policy-making and monitoring role, as well as the devolution of more responsibility to individual schools through mechanisms such as giving schools more budgetary control, more control over staff appointments, and ultimately more responsibility for their own success or failure. Schools are placed in much more of a market economy in which there is more explicit competition than ever before. By definition, these forces to strengthen power at the centre and the periphery weakens the influence of the centre - the regional authority.

The introduction of indicators

During the last three years the Scottish Office Education Department has placed a high priority on the development of a comprehensive set of indicators at a national level, working closely with regional authorities to foster some ownership on their part, and encourage their commitment to helping schools in turn to assume ownership of these. In other words, it was hoped that school administrators and classroom teachers would not see this as yet another imposition on their time and goodwill, but as something they could influence and that would be useful to them.

Developing an approach

In order to develop a balanced set of indicators small teams were commissioned to work on different aspects of these. One team took on the task of developing indicators which would tell schools something useful about the expectations and attitudes of their clientele - the pupils, their parents, the teachers, and other staff working with, or in, schools.

Given the demands of time, economy, and logistics, the main instrument developed to get at the views of the main players was a set of questionnaires. These were developed through a process of trialling with headteachers, teachers, parents, and pupils. For example, small groups of pupils were asked to fill out a questionnaire individually, then as a group were taken through it, and asked to comment on the questions (understandable? useful? unambiguous?) and to invent questions which *they* thought would say something important about their school or their teachers.

On the basis of a series of such trials the questionnaires were revised and revised again. This process brought with it some additions and modifications to the questionnaire approach. Such an instrument could not, for example, be used with pupils in the younger years of primary schools, nor with nursery school children (pre 5s), nor could it be used in Special Schools (for children with learning difficulties), nor with children in mainstream schools who had reading difficulties. So alternatives were devised, such as giving to teachers of very young children a discussion schedule which they could use with children in a non-threatening environment (for example, the child sitting on the teacher's knee).

In the Scottish context the development of indicators which rest to a large degree on the views of pupils and parents, is seen in many quarters as both threatening and of dubious validity. The historical context is one in which schools and teachers have seen themselves as authorities and as professionals, and parents have to a considerable extent been happy to collude with the notion that education takes place in school at the hands of highly trained practitioners, and parents support the school by their confidence and trust in the integrity of the professionals. This deference to the professionals was exemplified when School Board were introduced. A widespread parental response was to put up for election those parents who stood on a hands-off ticket, promising not to 'interfere' in professional business.

What weight can we place on pupil and parent views anyway, it is argued, since pupils have a limited understanding, and parents even more so. Can pupils be counted on to be fair, to take a long view, to take the exercise seriously?

However, it is also often argued that a teacher, or a school's most valuable sources of feedback are pupils, fellow teachers, and parents. Regrettably they do not often offer such information voluntarily, and systematic evaluation which includes their views is not common practice. When pupils express their appreciation or parents write in to thank a teacher it is one of the most gratifying things that can happen. When they offer criticism it is often less easy for teachers to

accept because it seems like an isolated attack without context and without acknowledgement of all the effort, and of often inconspicuous work which is all too easily taken for granted.

The task facing the development team, then, was to to create a form of systematic evaluation and feedback which recognised the potential threat and the potential reward, and at the same time acknowledged that any such enterprise would not only be sensitive but be time-consuming and resource-consuming as well? so it was agreed at an early stage that the process should be 'owned' by the school itself, and not seen as something imposed from outside (by the Inspectorate or the regional authority). So, the following process was followed by the project development team

Design of a first draft of questionnaires

- ↳ Trialling of first drafts
- ↳ Revision of draft questionnaires
- ↳ Permission sought from regional authorities to approach schools
- ↳ Approach to primary and secondary schools to discuss and explain the project, making clear that involvement was voluntary. School allowed time to consult, and encouraged to consult widely before agreeing.
- ↳ Return to discuss draft questionnaires with head teachers, and/or senior management team and School Board.
- ↳ Questionnaires revised and adapted, or alternatives proposed, and final form customised (eg school crest etc.)
- ↳ Administration of questionnaires (and alternatives) by the school
- ↳ Processing of results, either by the school itself or by project team
- ↳ Written report feeding back of findings to head teacher/senior management team and School Board
- ↳ Revision of the report in light of feedback
- ↳ Discussions about further dissemination eg report to parents, to pupils
- ↳ Follow up meetings (e.g. with staff, pupils, or parents)
- ↳ Staff development, or school development, planning (typically looking at policies on homework, discipline, school uniform, equal opportunity, building, lunches, extra-curricular activities)

A school having gone through this process could choose to share their findings with regional authority advisers/inspectors or with HMI. However, no schools were expected or asked to do this, and given the initial contract that this was for their own self-evaluation if they chose to disseminate the results widely, or non-selectively, it could only be with the permission of at least the senior management team, School Board and staff.

So, a school undertaking this process, should embark on it because it believes that it is for their own good, that they will, as a result, be a better school, or will at least know more clearly what to do in order to become one. The more that evaluation process is a whole school enterprise in which everyone feels they have some investment, the more likely the chance of success.

What is meant by the 'whole school' is, of course, open to interpretation, but such a term ought to include senior management and teachers, and pupils. It might also be argued that parents, although not physically part of the school, are the school's most important source of support. The views of 'support staff' (office staff and janitors) need also be considered, as might those of other members of the community who have an important perspective, or play a significant part in the life of the school. This is especially true of special schools where the involvement of all staff is seen as essential, and community support is at a premium.

The longer-term implications of using this evaluation process for both internal and external audit are currently being explored, but schools themselves believe that those tensions can be resolved.

The questionnaires

It was agreed by all those involved that as the main instrument of evaluation the questionnaires should meet the following criteria:

- be engaging
- be user friendly
- be concise
- use unambiguous terms and language
- tap a wide range of aspects of school and classroom life
- gauge common concerns from three or more different viewpoints
- gauge concerns which are specific to different viewpoints
- provide space for open-ended comment

So, while the questionnaires would contain a number of core questions which would be answered by all 'players', and so allow comparisons (or triangulations) , there ought also to be questions which were specific to each group's peculiar interests.

The parent perspective

Parents are sometimes seen as the 'consumers' or 'clients' of schools. Whether or not that is an acceptable definition of their role they are widely acknowledged as having a seminal influence on their children's learning, and are potentially valued allies of the teacher. Numerous studies of parents' views agree that they have a particular interest in answers to questions such as the following:

Is my child:

- enjoying school?
- happy?
- safe?
- well behaved and learning good behaviour?
- able to get on with other pupils?
- being treated fairly by teachers?
- being given the fullest opportunities to learn?
- being helped to make the best choices?

The pupil perspective

While sharing some of these concerns, young people have other issues which would not necessarily those of their parents. In addition to questions similar to the above parent-questions, pupils offered the following suggestions of their own:

- If you don't understand something will the teacher help you?
- Does the teacher tell you how you are getting on?
- Can the teacher control the class?
- Can the teacher take a joke?
- Do you get punished for things you didn't do?
- Do teachers apologise when they are in the wrong?
- Do teachers pick on you or treat you all the same?

The teacher perspective

Teachers share similar concerns to pupils and parents, but see their ability to teach effectively as dependent on how they themselves are treated, their conditions of service, their morale, and the overall management of the school. Questions they are interested in are, for example:

- Is the school environment pleasant to work in?
- Is there a climate of discipline?
- Do you get the resources you need to do the job?
- Do you get support from management?
- Do you get support from parents?
- Are decisions made with or without consultation?
- Is staff development time used effectively?

The perspective of headteachers and senior management

Head teachers and senior management have an interest in all these questions but also need to know how they are seen by staff, pupils, and parents:

- Is there effective communication ? with staff? with parents? with pupils?
- Do staff feel they are involved in decision-making?
- Are different subject departments treated equitably?
- In special schools is the contribution of non-teaching staff recognised and valued?
- Is there effective monitoring of teaching?
- Is there effective monitoring of administrative staff?
- How is the head teacher regarded? by staff? by parents? by pupils?

Each different set of players clearly wants information that is important to them and their role and task, and both evaluation and school development planning need to start from that premiss. It needs to take account of both the idiosyncratic and the shared concerns, and acknowledge that an effective school is one that is effective for everybody. All parties have a common interest in a pleasant and productive environment, safety, good discipline, good relationships, motivation and enjoyment in learning , success and achievement.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS TO PARENTS:

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
"I feel I can go up to the school any time because I get such a nice welcome"				
"If parents complain teachers just close ranks on us"				
"I really feel they know my child as an individual"				
"I am confident that if there's a problem they'll let me know immediately"				
" I know we can just pick up the phone and get advice or help"				
"Sometimes there's too much homework and at other times very little or none"				

TO PUPILS

THINGS THAT MIGHT HAPPEN	would never happen	unlikely to happen	likely to happen	happens often
A gang of older pupils bullied younger ones every day in playground				
A teacher made fun of someone in front of the class				
A pupil cracked a joke about the teacher and the teacher took it in good part				
A pupil didn't understand the class work but was too afraid to ask for help				
A pupil swore at a teacher				
A teacher swore at a pupil				
A teacher went out of her way to encourage and praise pupils who were not very good at classwork				

TO TEACHERS

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
"I often feel my abilities have not been recognised"				
"I get the feeling that I am listened to and my views are taken seriously by promoted staff:"				
"It is difficult to talk to anyone in school about problems in my teaching"				
"I would not welcome appraisal of my teaching by promoted staff"				
"I get a lot of help and support from my colleagues"				

Running the exercise

For schools undertaking the exercise there were some principles to be observed. Perhaps most significant in terms of climate setting, and the ultimate value of the exercise, headteachers and senior management needed reminding of some principles of consultation. The following guidelines were given to schools:

"

1 People need to know why the survey is being conducted.

Teachers like to be consulted and dislike impositions on their time and goodwill. Explanations at staff and departmental meetings and opportunities for discussion in smaller groups is critical. Prior consultation on questions, administration and processing is both judicious and helpful, as there are always new and ingenious ideas. The same is true of school Boards. Opportunities for them to make their own suggestions and and contributions is likely to give them a greater insight into, and commitment to, the exercise. The same principle may be applied to pupils, or pupil representative groups.

2 Participants need to know what is going to be done with the information.

Knowledge of how the information will be used is particularly significant for teachers. Comments and judgements made by pupils and parents may be critical of them and they have to be reassured that no individuals will be identified in reporting the findings. Teachers are also likely to have to put into effect any action or innovation resulting from the survey. Pupils tend to be more philosophical, accepting it as one of these things that happens in school, but this is not a justification for ignoring their rights and potential educative functions of the exercise for them.

3 Honest and useful statements of opinion depend on the assurance of confidentiality.

Ensuring confidentiality is an essential element in obtaining honest and therefore useful answers. but there are also a myriad of ways of beating the system and it is difficult to achieve complete confidentiality. For example, perceptive and knowledgeable teachers can often identify individuals from the information on a particular form. It is, therefore, important that those in charge of the exercise ensure that teachers are carefully briefed about the protocol and the procedures for collecting and storing of the questionnaires, and about respecting pupils' rights not to disclose what they have written.

"

These may seem obvious principles but tend to be observed most in the breach. Confidentiality, for example, is difficult to ensure and teachers may blatantly, or deviously, breach this principle. After collecting the questionnaires from his class one teacher was overheard going through the questionnaire item by item, saying

"Hands up those who said they enjoyed going to school".

In another school a guidance teacher admitted to the following:

> *"I used the five finger trick. What I do is I spread the fingers of my hand and when the particular forms are handed that I want to be able to identify them later I slide them between my fingers and hold them like that".*

This teacher's reasoning was that there were one or two pupils' forms that he wanted to check because these were children at risk and their responses might therefore be important for guidance purposes. While, a laudable aim perhaps, it is nonetheless a breach of trust, and a betrayal of the confidentiality principle.

Again, while perhaps obvious, it proved to be important to spell out some of the principles of consultation and communication with parents.

"

Provide a covering letter which is brief, friendly and clear. It should describe

- what the aims of the survey are
- how the school will benefit
- where the questionnaire comes from
- why the respondent is being contacted
- what the parent is required to do
- how long it should take to complete
- when he/she is required to complete the task
- how and when the questionnaire should be returned
- who will see the responses
- what will be done with the information, *emphasising confidentiality*

"

The following climate-setting procedure used in one school was offered as an example which others might like to follow:

School E issued the questionnaire to one year group at a time over a four week period. A week before issuing it, the year group was brought into the school 'forum'; pupils were divided into groups of eight chaired by one of their number, and given an hour to work on their own agenda of issues to do with school life. They were then told about the questionnaire which they would get the the following week and asked to use the forthcoming seven days to reflect on positive and negative aspects of school life. The following week they were brought back and the questionnaire was introduced and administered.

The processing

The administration of the questionnaire (and alternative procedures) produced a large amount of data to be processed. The parent questionnaire contains 43 questions, the pupil questionnaire 50, and the teacher questionnaire 63 questions. The pupil return was likely to be anything from 80 - 100% depending on absenteeism and opportunities for absent pupils to participate. The parent numbers were dependent on rate of return, falling between 35% and 95%. Staff returns came close to 100%. So, for a notional school of 1000 this meant something like 1000 pupil questionnaires returns, 350-850 parent returns (if one return from each parent then about 500 to 700), and say 50-60 teachers.

There are essentially three ways of handling this amount of data - the "low tech", in other words by hand, the "medium tech", that is using computer software such as the Apple Mac, and the "high tech", which means having access to state of the art technology (an unlikely option at for most schools). The alternative is for the school to sample each, or some, of the populations. Schools tended not to do this because they didn't want anyone to feel left out. The most effective compromise was to give it to all pupils and teachers and sample the parents.

Processing the qualitative data

Whether pupils wrote comments at the end of the questionnaire or not depended on the time given and the invitation by the supervising teacher to do so or not. The length of comment was related to this, but also to pupil ability and motivation. A secondary school of 1000 pupils could be expected to produce about 650 written comments. These each might deal with five or six themes. In other words in a 1000 pupil school there might be upwards of 3000 comments to be classified. The analysis of this kind of extensive qualitative data is a time-consuming process, but those who undertook it invariably found it a fruitful and interesting one.

The following is the quantification of pupil comments in one school:

PUPIL COMMENTS - summary

	no. of pupils
condition of school	146
lack of facilities	136
desire for uniform	111
unequal treatment	99
litter problem	90
complaints about toilets	86
request for longer lunch hour	79
need for more understanding by teachers	69
praise for teachers	65
teachers jumping dinner queue	58
desire for more extra-curricular activities	56
timetabling issues	55
curricular issues	51
lack of effective discipline	49
comments about good school	47
nowhere to go at breaks	45
returning adults treated better	41
I like PE/more PE	40

Analysis and interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of the figures needs to be economical and accessible for schools who cannot be expected to work out correlations, clusters and standard deviations. So the following procedure was adopted:

Schools were given a suggested list of twelve indicators. These were not to be treated as definitive. They could replace or supplement these with their own. Under each of these twelve headings a number of relevant questions were listed. A procedure was suggested for examining the data in relation to each indicator. For example:

The twelve suggested indicators are:

- pupil morale
- teacher morale
- teachers' job satisfaction
- the physical environment
- the learning environment
- teacher-pupil relationships
- discipline
- equality and justice
- extra-curricular activities
- school leadership
- information to parents
- parent-teacher consultation

For the first of these, pupil morale, a definition and procedure is suggested:

1. Pupil morale

The degree to which pupils enjoy school and feel that what they are learning is interesting and relevant.

The procedure starts by looking at a table of responses on some of the questions relevant to that indicator, and suggests different ways of interpreting such a table:

percentages

	all the time	most of the time	sometimes	never
I enjoy being at school	3	48	46	4
I find school work interesting	2	37	58	4
I get bored in class	3	13	78	6
I am unhappy in class	2	5	50	44
I am worried I can't do the work	2	7	61	30
I feel unsafe in the playground	1	1	24	73

(The following is an example from a list of suggested possible incidents. Pupils are asked to say whether such things might happen "in this school").

	would never happen	unlikely to happen	likely to happen	happens often
"A gang of older pupils bullied younger ones every day in the playground"	12	56	26	6

Guidelines to schools then suggest some ways of disaggregating these statistics, for example by year group. Again different ways of interpreting these figures are suggested:

	percentages (all/most of the time)					
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
I enjoy being at school	63	42	51	49	42	65
I find school work interesting	50	32	41	39	33	58

	percentages (likely/happens often)					
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
A gang of older pupils bullied younger ones.....	47	36	32	30	22	20

	percentages (*sometimes*)					
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
I feel unsafe in the playground	46	29	21	9	0	0

Schools found it very helpful to have results from other (anonymised) schools with which to compare their own patterns. The following, for example, may challenge some of school A's conclusions about generalised patterns.

	percentages (all/most of the time)					
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
I enjoy being at school	63	62	31	48	62	58
I find school work interesting	55	47	25	29	39	32

Disaggregation by sex/gender is a further illuminating process.

(percentages)

		all the time	most of the time	sometimes	never
I enjoy being at school	boys	2	43	51	5
	girls	4	53	41	2
I find school work interesting	boys	3	28	62	7
	girls	1	45	54	2

Again it is helpful to have comparisons so that schools can know if these arê school-specific or general differences. (the gender differences, in fact ,tended to be common to all schools in this study). Further disaggregation could be done by home language (Urdu, Bengali, Cantonese, Shona etc.)

Further cross-referencing is provided by setting these figures against the open-ended section of the questionnaire in which pupils write their own unprompted comments. Relevant to the indicator in question - pupil morale - pupils typically wrote about things to do with their own happiness, safety, anxieties or problems with teachers. There are also many comments which give important clues to relevant action that could be taken by the school or by teachers, sometimes with helpful pointers to good practice.

for example the following are two comments from the school in this example which illustrate a) effective dealing with bullying (at least as far as one pupil is concerned) and b) one reason for the raise in pupils' morale in senior school

"I like the way the headteacher stops the bullying and if you are scared to go home will drive you home." (1st year - 12 year old -boy)

"In S the upper school in my opinion are treated like adults. In 5th and 6th years the pupils are allowed a wider scope, and can identify with teachers, who in turn, in my opinion make 5th and 6th years feel more adult by treating them with more respect." (upper secondary)

The next step in the process is to compare pupils' judgements with those of teachers and parents. For example, these are parent and teacher answers to the same question in the school quoted above.

"Most pupils enjoy being at school"

(percentages)

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
PARENT	2	78	20	1
TEACHER	7	69	25	0

"Most pupils find school work interesting"

(percentages)

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
PARENT	1	75	22	1
TEACHER	3	62	35	0

These figures provide interesting further 'evidence'. They show

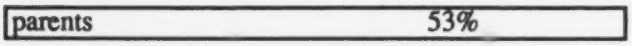
- a generally very positive response
- the same tendency for enjoyment to be rated higher than interest
- a quite close match between teachers' and parents' judgements
- that parents are more optimistic than teachers
- that teachers are closer to pupils' judgements than are parents in estimating the enjoyment -interest differential

Comparing the perspectives

Perhaps the most illuminating information of all comes from the comparison of different perspectives. Compare, for example, the following:

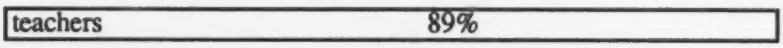
The school explains to parents what part they can play in their child's education"

The school has explained to me what part I can play in my child's education"

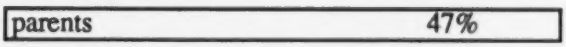


and

The school explains its homework policy to parents



The school has explained its policies on homework to me



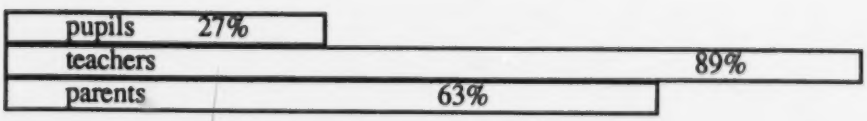
Responses to these questions have led schools to ask

- How **do** we try to convey messages to parents?
- How do we know the message has been received?
- How do we know if it has been accepted or understood?
- What does it actually mean for parents in day to day reality?
- What more could the school, or individual teachers, do?

The following triangulation with regard to homework is highly revealing. There is close agreement by all parties on **amount** of homework, but whether or not it is discussed by teachers seems much more open to question:

"appropriate amount of homework" *strongly agree/agree*

"teachers talk about homework" *strongly agree/agree*



One school in a highly deprived area of the city asked parents to say whether the questionnaire had been filled out by mother, father, or both. It produced some interesting differences:

Mother and father differences

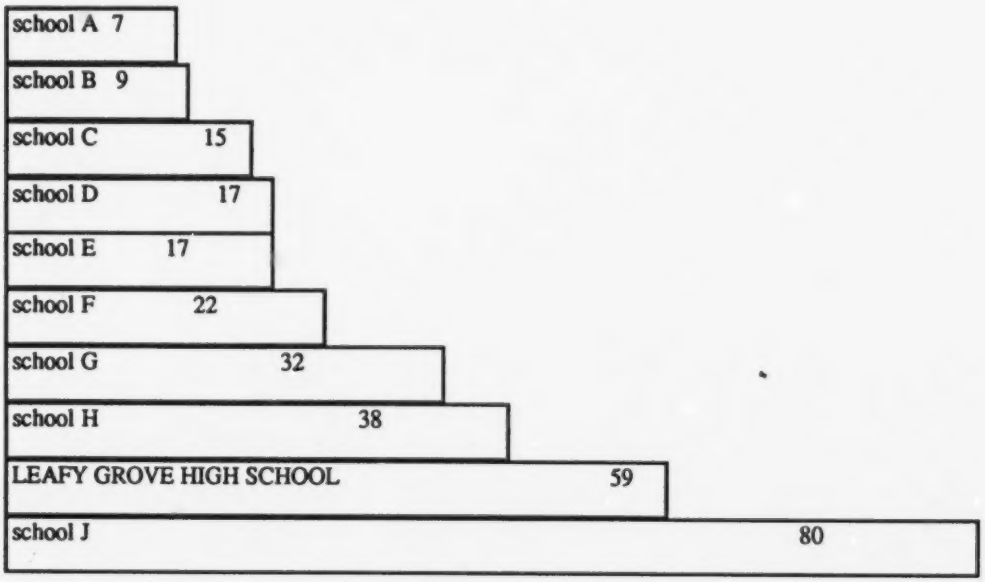
	% agree/strongly agree or 'yes'	
	mother	father
School facilities are adequate	72	29
Teachers treat all pupils fairly	74	36
The school board seems a useful thing	64	36
School buildings are kept clean	83	57
I'm happy about what my child is learning	90	69
Teachers are approachable and sympathetic	87	69
Most pupils find school work interesting	82	64
Meetings are arranged at a time which suits	72	50
Most pupils enjoy school	79	62
Teachers show respect for pupils	73	57

Inter-school comparisons

Bald statistics were not always self-explanatory and their significance was often relative rather than absolute. Did a statistic reflect something endemic to all school, or was it relevant to that school only? In other words, schools wanted to know where they stood in relation to others. One way of providing this information was to feed back results to schools, showing that school in relation to anonymised others, and/or presenting statistics for those closest in socio-economic population.

'school buildings are kept clean and in good order"

percentages of teachers responding positively



Inter-school comparisons and 'league tables' raise a sensitive issue. In the U.K., league tables of examination results are promised in the near future, but resisted by those who see them as both an unfair and partial way of comparing schools. League tables which include measures of pupil, parent, and teacher perceptions might go some way in filling-out or contextualising such raw data. They might, of course, only compound the felony.

Some issues

Climate setting

- How do you create an open and positive climate for pupils, teachers, and parents to engage in the exercise?

Distribution and return of questionnaires

- How do you ensure that a high return rate for questionnaires, especially with parents? Incentives? Is it better to sample and follow up a limited sample?

Analysis and processing

- How do schools themselves undertake the time-consuming task of processing the information?

Confidentiality

- How is confidentiality safeguarded, and sensitive information treated with sensitivity?

Interpretation and presentation

- What do the statistics mean and how are they made meaningful? How should that be presented and interpreted for different audiences e.g. pupils? parents?

Language and cultural differences

- How are the different perspectives of a multi-cultural population respected, and responses interpreted?

Alternative procedures for pupils or parents with learning difficulties ?

- What are the most effective alternatives for non-readers or for pupils or parents with other forms of learning difficulty? How valid or reliable are they?

Internal and external locus of evaluation

- Will a school's own self-evaluation for internal purposes produce different results from one which is to be seen (or conducted) by outside bodies (e.g. the Inspectorate)? Can these two locuses of evaluation be married?

The value of normative and comparative data

- If schools are to be compared what is the value of norms or comparisons? How can these take account of different school contexts?

Follow-up and school development planning

- Having conducted the survey what is the best way of building on the findings and using the findings in school development planning?

Validity and reliability

- How valid and reliable is the data that is generated? How much does it matter?

International comparisons

While this initiative is imbedded in one national educational system and culture, it is still worth asking to what extent it might be possible to make international comparisons, and to consider what we can learn from parallel developments in other countries (Canada, the USA, Denmark).

Hopefully this paper and this seminar will play an important role in such an information and learning exchange.

John MacBeath
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